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Keeping the Peace: America in Korea, 1950-2010

Sung-Yoon Lee

The Fletcher School, Tufts University



SUNG-YOON LEE is adjunct assistant professor of international politics at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and an associate in research at the Korea Institute at Harvard University. He earned a Ph.D. in international relations from the Fletcher School, and is a frequent commentator on the BBC and NPR. He has lectured widely, including at the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Dr. Lee has written for the *Los Angeles Times*, *Asia Times*, *The Weekly Standard*, *The Wall Street Journal Asia*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, and *Asian Outlook*.

The following is adapted from a speech delivered at Hillsdale College on October 5, 2010, during a conference on the Korean War sponsored by the College's Center for Constructive Alternatives.

We are often reminded that the Korean War ended not with a formal peace treaty, but rather with an armistice. And indeed, that is an irrefutable fact. But it is not true that the absence of a formal peace treaty is an impediment to peace in Korea. The signing of such a treaty between the United States and North Korea today would not facilitate, let alone guarantee, genuine peace or denuclearization on the Korean peninsula. To believe that it would can only be the result of a fundamental misreading of the North Korean regime, both in terms of its nature and of its strategic intent.

It was on July 27, 1953, that the armistice bringing the Korean War to an end was signed. The war ended without a clear victor and with the Korean peninsula divided more or less along the same lines as at the beginning of the war on June 25, 1950. Despite the lack of a final resolution, the armistice made possible a long peace in Northeast Asia and planted the seeds of South Korea's freedom and prosperity.

In North Korea, on the other hand, July 27 has a different meaning. The date is referred to as the day of "Victory in Fatherland Liberation War," and Pyongyang commemorates each year "the anniversary of the great victory of the Korean people in the Fatherland

ALSO INSIDE >
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Liberation War.” North Korea considers it a reminder of the unfinished business of communizing the entire Korean peninsula—or, in the words of North Korea’s Communist Party Charter, “the accomplishment of the revolutionary goals of national liberation and the people’s democracy on the entire area of the country.” The war may have ended in 1953, but the North Korean revolution rages on. This fact helps explain the fundamental geopolitical dynamic on the peninsula.

In this light, consider North Korea’s repeated demand for a peace treaty with the United States. What explains its insistence on signing such a treaty with its “vanquished” foe? The answer is self-evident: to realize its goal of evicting U.S. forces from South Korea. Ever since North Korea joined the World Health Organization in 1973 and opened a diplomatic mission in New York the following year, it has been proposing bilateral peace negotiations with Washington. Of course, this didn’t stop it from sending assassins to kill South Korean President Park Chung Hee or kidnapping South Korean fishermen. Why would a nation that claims to seek peace engage in such war-like activities? The answer is that North Korea is not seeking peace, but rather a change in the military balance of power on the Korean peninsula. In addition, North Korea regularly makes threats against the U.S., its ostensible future partner in peace. Why? Because Pyongyang sees *itself* as the party wielding the carrots and sticks in order to cajole and coerce its adversaries, Washington and Seoul. In other words,

North Korea acts upon its own strategy. It does not merely react to signals coming out of Washington or Seoul, no matter how “diplomatic” they may be.

I grant that it is *possible* a peace treaty might be conducive to reconciliation between the two Koreas and stability in the region; but this will be the case only if it does not lead to calls for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea. What is more likely is that such a treaty would cause all sides—not only North Koreans, but South Koreans and Americans, too—to question the need for a continued U.S. presence in Korea. And this would in turn advance a top priority of the North Korean state: the complete and irreversible removal of U.S. troops from South Korea. Considering the size of North Korea’s military and its stocks of both conventional and nuclear weapons, the results would likely be disastrous.

The presence of U.S. troops in South Korea has been and remains the greatest deterrent to North Korean adventurism and a disruption of the current and longstanding peace on the Korean peninsula. And to repeat an important point: the absence of a formal peace treaty no more threatens this peace than the absence of a post-World War Two peace treaty between Moscow and Tokyo threatens the peace between Russia and Japan.

But does Korea even matter, from America’s strategic point of view? Consider the lessons of four other wars in and around Korea in the 60-year period leading up to 1950: the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), the First Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), the Second Sino-Japanese War

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[Latin]: in the first place

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(1937-45), and the Pacific War (1941-45). In each of these, Japan was the principal actor, driven by a desire to change the geopolitical setting in its favor. And taken together, these earlier conflicts powerfully reinforce the lesson of the Korean War itself: a power vacuum in Korea is an invitation to aggression.

By defeating China in 1895, Japan won Taiwan as its first colony and effectively ended the centuries-old Chinese world order. By defeating Russia in 1905, Japan won international recognition of its “paramount political, military and economic interests in Korea,” as enshrined in the Treaty of Portsmouth. By 1937, Japan was in full control of its Korean colony and prepared to utilize the Korean peninsula as a supply base and military platform for invading China. Lacking strategic interests in Northeast Asia, the U.S. stood by as Japan gobbled up Korea and advanced into Manchuria. But Japan’s military successes peaked at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and it was defeated in August 1945. By then, the geopolitical importance of Korea was not lost on the victorious allies, who partitioned the peninsula at the 38th Parallel.

The United States, in control of defeated Japan and the southern half of liberated Korea, now emerged as the key shaper of geopolitics in Northeast Asia. But after governing South Korea from 1945 to 1948, and despite lingering misgivings about North Korea’s intentions, the U.S. began to withdraw troops from the South. By the summer of 1949, it had returned to a policy of benign neglect. At this point Kim Il Sung—father of the current North Korean leader, Kim Jong Il—took advantage of the power vacuum and launched an invasion of the South. This attempt to unify the Korean peninsula under communist control was thwarted by a multinational coalition led by the United States, and South Korea was saved.

In the 57 years since the armistice, North Korea has time and again shown its willingness to take considerable risks to turn the strategic environment in its favor. The sinking of the Cheonan, a South Korean naval ship, in March of this

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year, and the bombing of a South Korean island on November 23, are but the latest in a long history of deadly attacks. But today the North Korean regime faces its most serious internal political challenges in nearly 20 years: severe economic stresses, the increasing infiltration of information, higher numbers of its citizens attempting to defect to the South, and the challenge of handing over dynastic power from a long-ruling father to an unproven son in his twenties.

This uncertain situation presents a rare opportunity for policymakers in Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo to bring about changes in the North Korean regime and ensure peace and stability in the region. Engaging the North Korean people—rather than the regime—by means of information operations and facilitating defections, while simultaneously constricting Pyongyang’s cash flow, is the best means to that end. It’s also important for Washington to hold quiet consultations with Beijing to prepare jointly for a unified Korea under Seoul’s direction, a new polity that will be free, peaceful, capitalist, pro-U.S. and pro-China.

In an Orwellian world, “war is peace, freedom is slavery, and ignorance is strength.” In the North Korean world, the past 57 years of de facto peace is war, a life of servitude to the state is freedom, and national strength is rooted in ignorance of the outside world. Today, as trouble is once again brewing on the Korean peninsula, we would do well to remember the noble resolve of those who fought back the North Korean invasion in 1950-53 and the precious gift they left behind: an extended period of peace and a free and prosperous South Korea. Those courageous soldiers taught us that deterrence is peace, freedom is not free, and that to remember the past is a mark of national character and strength.

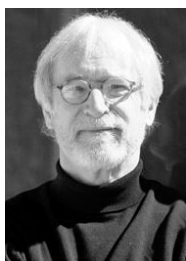
The great and noble efforts of Americans in the Korean War, the legacy of a 60-year friendship between the U.S. and

South Korea, and U.S. strategic interests should not now be sacrificed on the altar of diplomatic peace. Now is rather the time for prudent and pragmatic policymakers to pave the way for a permanent peace on

the Korean peninsula, and, in doing so, to pay the greatest honor possible to all those who served in a war—often referred to by historians as “The Forgotten War”—that is decidedly forgotten no more. ■

Making Films for Families: *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

A Discussion with Bob Beltz of Walden Media



BOB BELTZ is the Senior Pastor of Highline Community Church in Centennial, Colorado, and a special advisor to Philip Anschutz, Chairman of the Board of the Anschutz Corporation, the parent company of Walden Media. Dr. Beltz has helped in the development, production, and marketing of such Walden Media films as *Because of Winn-Dixie*; *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*; *Amazing Grace*; *The William Wilberforce Story*; *Prince Caspian*; and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, which opened in theaters this month. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is adapted from the third in a series of seven fantasy novels for children, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, written by the British scholar and Christian apologist C.S. Lewis. In it, characters from the series’ first two books—Lucy and Edmund Pevensie, with their cousin Eustace—again leave London for the world of Narnia and meet up with Prince Caspian for a journey on his royal ship Dawn Treader.

Hillsdale College alumna and writer Lauren Fink, '07, spoke with Dr. Beltz by phone at his home in Colorado on November 30, 2010. A longer version of this interview can be viewed at hillsdale.edu/imprimis.

LAUREN FINK: As a theologian and pastor, how did you get into making movies?

BOB BELTZ: It was something I would have never planned on doing, and it really had to do with my friendship with Mr. Anschutz going back almost 25 years. So when he decided to attempt to get into this area of film and make a positive difference, he invited me to be a part of it as an advisor. I got plucked out of pastoral ministry and dropped into a very strange world.

LF: Why were you and Walden Media interested in a film adaptation of *The Chronicles of Narnia*?

BB: The mission of the company is to do family-friendly films that [reflect moral and Christian] values. A number of us

were lifelong C.S. Lewis fans, and pretty early in the history of the company, some people at Walden brought up the suggestion that we should try and see what’s happening with the *Chronicles*, because no one had made the movies. The rights had been controlled for about seven years by Paramount, which was unable to create a concept that the Lewis estate was willing to sign off on, and the rights were about to expire. Walden made contact with those who control [Lewis’s] estate and began discussions of the possibility of Walden stepping in and taking the project on and making films in a way that [Walden and the Lewis estate could agree on] We share common values, and a commitment to them to do the best job we could to stay faithful to the source material was really what they were looking for

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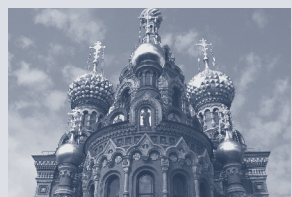
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LF: Why are movies effective in conveying ideas of faith? How do they differ from books as an educational tool?

BB: Film is such a different medium, and it communicates at quite a different level. The way I perceive it is that books connect with us at the level of mind, and the story—especially the visual story—is a way to connect at the heart level, a visceral level. The medium of film is [quite] powerful in impacting people’s lives. Take something like these Narnia books—which have had such an influence already—and transfer that to film, and it exposes the books to a whole new audience . . . It’s said that the movie theater is the church of the post-modern world—and I don’t totally agree with that, of course, or else I would be running a theater instead of pastoring a church. But our culture, particularly our younger culture, has grown up in such a visual world. My son is 24 years old, and he watches a movie virtually every day. When you look at the amount of visual media that the culture consumes these days, it just makes sense that we should be trying to step in and convert some of these great stories [to film].

LF: How friendly is the mainstream movie industry to Walden Media’s mission? Has that changed since the first film?

BB: The way Walden has approached and executed its mission has actually been very well received within the industry. Some of the early successes that Walden had with family-friendly films really got other industry people looking at the genre again . . . Generally speaking, what Hollywood notices is what is successful. When *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* had success, it earned respect for Walden within the industry . . .

LF: What are some of the main spiritual and moral issues addressed in the film?

BB: In 1961, C.S. Lewis wrote a letter responding to a question from a reader about the themes of *The Dawn Treader* book. [He] said that his intention was to

write a book about the spiritual life, or the spiritual journey. What’s unique about *Dawn Treader* is that, structurally, you have this series of adventures as the ship sails from island to island . . . What you will see in the film. . . is the epic struggle between good and evil, involving faith, temptation and trials. *Dawn Treader* has a huge theme of transformation. Eustace [begins as a] little twit of a kid—he’s such a great character. The opening line [of the book is], “There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it.” The film has captured that, and his journey—particularly [of his] becoming a dragon and going through the process of Aslan [the Christlike figure who appears as a lion in Narnia] de-dragonizing him—is a powerful story of transformation . . . The other message that permeates this story . . . is how the [courageous mouse] character Reepicheep longs for Aslan’s country. As a child, he hears the lines,

Where sky and water meet,
Where the waves grow sweet,
Doubt not, Reepicheep,
To find all you seek,
There is the utter East.

He has longed to be one who ultimately stays in Aslan’s country.

LF: Lewis was a Christian writer, and many consider the *Chronicles of Narnia* to be a Christian allegory. Do you agree?

BB: Lewis said it *wasn’t* an allegory, [and this] has been quoted a lot. But oftentimes no one goes on to quote what else he said. He called [the *Chronicles*] a “supposal.” To him, as a scholar of medieval and renaissance literature, allegory had a very specific meaning. And when you read the *Chronicles*, it’s really not an allegory. [So] he called it a ‘supposal’—as in “suppose there’s another world, and that world needs redemption.” At the end of *Dawn Treader*, when Lucy is so sad that she’s never going to see Aslan again, Aslan says to her, “I’m in your world too, and I have a different name, and you have to learn that name, and that’s the whole reason you’ve come

to Narnia is to know me there.” That’s probably the strongest statement [of the *Chronicles*’ purpose] that Lewis gives us.

LF: Where do we see an example of a character exhibiting faith in the *Dawn Treader* film?

BB: There are moments in the story when everyone else is very discouraged, saying, “we’re not going to get out of this.” Lucy steps in and says, “Aslan will save us.” [She has a] consistent belief in Aslan to meet their needs in moments of crisis . . . And the fact that the whole crew gets behind Caspian and is willing to encounter and fight the danger . . . is all an illustration of faith. [The story is] also about personal temptation and trial. When some of the characters meet Coriakin the Magician, he says to them, “You’re going to be tempted, and you’ve got to defeat the darkness within before you are able to defeat the darkness without.”

LF: Did the theory of Lewis’s planetary scheme in Michael Ward’s book, *Planet Narnia*—in particular *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* representing . . . the sun—influence the film’s adaptation of the book, in particular its use of light?

BB: I know that many of those involved in this project read Ward’s book, because it came out right as we were in early development on this project. If you watch the film, one thing you’ll see, particularly at the end of the film, is that the characters have a tremendous encounter with darkness. And the climax of the struggle between good and evil is followed by a journey toward the end of the world, the Sea of Lillies—which the film does a phenomenal job capturing—and the vision of Aslan’s country itself, and there’s a brightness to it. I’m not sure how much Ward’s book influenced the creators, but the concept of light and brightness is important to the film. My son was just commenting on how dark the last

Harry Potter film was—not just in theme, but the whole palette. And in particular, in contrast, at the end of *Dawn Treader* there is a brightness that emerges . . .

LF: What is the most prominent moral lesson in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*?

BB: I think the most prominent message in all the books—and so far in the three films—is that Aslan wins. [What Lewis is] trying to say is that God exists and evil exists, and that there’s this great conflict between the forces of good and evil, and ultimately God wins.

LF: Are there other works by C.S. Lewis, besides the *Chronicles*, that should be put into movie form?

BB: I’m dying to see [Lewis’s] space trilogy done in film. They are some of my favorite books and there’s tremendous potential in them, and I’m hoping that Walden gets the rights to them . . . I think *That Hideous Strength*, the third book [in the space trilogy]—which is my favorite of all of Lewis’s books—out-does Harry Potter. I’m sure that J.K. Rowling borrowed a lot of ideas from that book when she created some of her characters. And I think a film of that would be a home run.

LF: Do you have any insight into what Lewis would think of his children’s books being made into films?

BB: I would tread on that subject lightly. Doug Gresham, Lewis’s son-in-law, thinks that when Lewis talked about not wanting his books made into films, part of the reason is that the technology of his day wouldn’t have done the books justice. And certainly, these are not films that could have been made properly even ten years ago.

Still, my perception of Lewis is that he might not have been a great fan of film. I will bow out on any definite answer to that question, and I only hope Lewis is not rolling over in his grave. ■



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